DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 108 568 IR 002 062

AUTHOR Sparks, Rita
TITLE University Library Participation in the Neighborhood Youth Corps Program.
INSTITUTION Oakland Univ., Rochester, Mich. Kresge Library.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Disadvantaged Youth; Failure Factors; Job Analysis; Job Training; *Libraries; Library Role; On the Job Training; Program Evaluation; Program Planning; Success Factors; *University Libraries; Youth Agencies; *Youth Employment; *Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Neighborhood Youth Corps; NYC

ABSTRACT

The Oakland University Kresge Library in Rochester, Michigan placed 10 Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC) enrollees in their library following assurances that they would be tested prior to placement and assigned to areas of their occupational choice. The project required 32 hours of work per week for 9 weeks at $2.00 per hour, paid by the NYC Program. The NYC Program was also to provide the enrollees with counseling and instructional sessions related to their work experiences. It was found that heeding the NYC "Success Model" criteria, analyzing jobs prior to the start of the Program, taking into account the gregariousness of the youth, providing continuous training, and encouraging positive attitudes on the part of supervisors are essential to a successful NYC Program. Four people were terminated during the program; 6 did a commendable job and received good recommendations from their supervisors. Almost all of the library supervisors expressed concern with the structure and lack of cooperation on the part of the NYC supervisory staff. The Program was expensive in terms of training and supervision, but it was concluded that, overall, the Program was mutually beneficial, and would be participated in again. (KKC)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED108563

A1
IR

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY PARTICIPATION
IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD YOUTH CORPS PROGRAM
SUMMER, 1974

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

by

Rita Sparks
Business Reference Librarian
Kresge Library
Oakland University
Rochester, Michigan 48063

IR 000 062

Hardly anything can equal the exhuberance of youth to dissipate summer doldrums in an academic library. "Action" became the password as ten members of the Neighborhood Youth Corps spent six weeks working in various departments of the Oakland University Kresge Library during the summer of 1974.

Neighborhood Youth Corps is a youth work-training experience program funded through the Department of Labor under the Economic Opportunity Act. It is the objective of the NYC to seek to keep youth in school, get them back in school, if out, and/or, in cooperation with non-profit organizations, provide disadvantaged youth with a meaningful work experience that will develop sound lifetime work attitudes and habits while giving service to the community.

Initially there were some misgivings as to whether an academic library could provide meaningful experiences for youth in the fourteen-to-eighteen-year-old age bracket. Kresge Library agreed to cooperate in placing seven youths following assurances that the young people would be tested prior to placement and assigned to areas of their occupational choice. A librarian in the Public Services Division was assigned the task of coordinating the project in the library. The youth were to work thirty-two hours per week for a period of nine weeks at two dollars per hour paid by the Program. In addition to screening and placement, the NYC Program was also to provide the enrollees with counseling services as well as instructional sessions related to their work experiences.

PREPARATION, TRAINING, AND SUPERVISION

The library supervisors who had volunteered to work with the youth met prior to the beginning of the Program in order to work out a plan for how many youths would be placed in various departments, the tasks that needed to be performed, and how to best handle the young and inexperienced workers. All supervisors were provided with a synopsis of NYC "Success Model" criteria[1] and it became apparent as the Program progressed that it is necessary to pay heed to these criteria.

It is essential that jobs be analyzed prior to the start of the Program so that the supervisor would be aware of what skills are required for each job, the expected duration of each project, and the best sequence for teaching basic components of each task. In projecting the manpower requirements, Kresge Library had overestimated the duration of some of the jobs or underestimated the speed of youth and consequently oversubscribed. Many of the entry-level jobs in an academic library seemed repetitive and boring to the youth. They were anxious to "get it over with" and worked so fast that some of the special projects like collating and stapling library handbooks and shifting the book and microfilm collections took only a few days instead of weeks as projected. The supervisors had the constant dilemma of finding more and "more interesting" projects.

The job analysis should also take into account the gregariousness of youth. Closed-in areas where the youth were assigned to work alone proved to be very unpopular and contributed to cases of claustrophobia or "uniphobia". Adjustments had to be made in initial assignments giving the workers an opportunity to interact and do their tasks in teams in more open areas. It was also learned that rotating assignments helped to alleviate monotony.

In addition to job analysis, continuous training was essential with the young workers. The most successful supervisors proved to be those who assumed no prior knowledge, outlined what is expected of the workers, and illustrated one step at a time. Visual demonstrations instead of lectures and written instructions were more effective, as some of the trainees lacked sophisticated written and verbal skills. A great deal of patience was required from the supervisors who had to work with the youth until they knew their jobs and could see how their task fit into the general scheme and why each step was important.

The youth were very sensitive to the supervisors' attitudes and were quick to sense negativism. The relationship a supervisor set with his first trainee set the pattern for the rest of the force. Supervisors who showed readiness to regard youth as a source of good ideas produced a reciprocal desire in the young people to live up to this opinion. The willingness of adults to let youth do a "great deal" when they have the potential is a big factor in the success or failure of programs such as the NYC. Most of the trainees were confident of their ability to make positive contributions and were discouraged when they perceived that some adults doubted them. Supervisors who originally approached the program as a "baby-sitting" venture and treated the youth with skepticism and suspicion seemed to give impetus to the self-fulfilling prophecy of the youths taking every opportunity to disappear from their posts, doing their work with a great deal of apathy, asking for transfers to other departments, and eventually entirely refusing to work for certain supervisors.

Altogether ten NYC enrollees were trained during the six-week period. Four young people terminated their work in the library for various reasons. One young man asked to be transferred because he disliked working inside and

another felt his supervisor was constantly spying on him. These workers got transferred to the Physical Plant Department where they worked out quite well. One fourteen-year-old girl was terminated after two weeks because she simply seemed to dislike working or was just too immature to settle down and did not want to stay on any job for more than one hour. It was felt that her sullenness was detrimental to the morale of the rest of the force. Another girl was terminated with great reluctance. She had a very friendly and co-operative attitude and was most conscientious about calling in when she was sick (which was almost every other day). In addition to her genuine health problem she also seemed to have a learning or visual disability and could not perform even the most elementary tasks satisfactorily. It was felt that this girl definitely should receive some testing and counseling to diagnose her difficulty but unfortunately no help was given her by the NYC Program although she was very willing to cooperate.

The six remaining trainees did a commendable job and received good recommendations from their supervisors. They accomplished a variety of tasks such as mending books; designing and drawing posters; alphabetizing and filing cards; collating and stapling library handbooks and bibliographies; typing cards, reports, and correspondence; helping sort mail; shifting book and microfilm collections; and running various errands. One exceptionally bright young man was bored with what he called "busy work" and was given the responsibility of shelving the Reference Collection. He learned the Library of Congress system with great ease, in two weeks only misshelved a couple of books, and was extremely pleased when he could point out mistakes made previously. This particular young man had been transferred to the library as a problem worker because he supposedly needed close supervision and had a habit of disappearing. When put under his own initiative he performed as

well or better than some college students. On two occasions when he was discovered "missing", he was found in the microfilm room tracing some important event with the help of the New York Times Index, or reading a book. One could hardly reprimand the young man for "wasting time" in this manner, especially since he had finished all his assigned duties. The supervisors were surprised to learn that this bright and mature young man was only fourteen years old.

PROBLEMS

With few exceptions, the supervisors reported that they enjoyed working with the youth, found them to be cooperative, energetic, and performing their tasks well. Almost all, however, expressed concern with the structure and lack of cooperation on the part of the NYC Program itself. Most of the complaints stemmed from the fact that the County management did not assume the responsible attitude they were supposed to instil in the youth. The Program was one week late in starting but nobody was notified of the fact with the enrollees and employers waiting from day to day to see what would happen. Phone calls were not returned and the County office staff never knew where the supervisors could be reached or if they would come to the office that day. Busses ran late or did not show up at all. The youth had to stand on the corner not knowing if they would be picked up. Some of the more persevering youth would call around and find their own rides to work but many went home discouraged after long, hot waits. Departure times would be changed without notifying the youth or their supervisors and workers were frequently left behind and had to be taken home by their supervisors.

Not only did the County office fail to test and screen the youth as originally promised, they even neglected to mention to some of the students on the bus where they were being taken. As the young people were taken to

the cafeteria for lunch the first day, one of the girls saw a friend and asked what she was doing here. After being told by the friend that she is studying here, the surprised girl exclaimed, "Oh, are we at a college!" It had never occurred to the library personnel to tell the youth that they were at Oakland University. It had been assumed that the NYC counselors had at least told the youth where they would be placed but it was quickly learned not to assume anything.

After agreeing with two different NYC counselors that one of our girls would have to be terminated, it was quite a surprise to have her report for work three days later bearing a doctor's certificate. The girl had been ill and had not been informed of the fact that she had been terminated the previous week. It took several phone calls trying to trace supervisors before the matter was resolved. New replacements were likewise brought in unpredictably without prior notification to make sure someone would be available to train the newcomer. Just a little consideration and a few phone calls would have saved a great deal of confusing incidents. The students got scheduled for more days and hours than originally anticipated, supervisors learned of changes in scheduling after the announcements were made to the workers on the bus, and the farewell parties many departments had planned for the youth never materialized because the Program ended two weeks early without notice. In all fairness, one has to mention that not all the blame for the confusion can be put on the County administration. They were also hampered by the fact that fund allocations did not come through on time or in the amounts anticipated.

Some problems also arose because the NYC workers were initially not recognized as equal members of the University community although they spent forty-hour weeks on campus most of the summer. No provisions had been made

for allowing the youths access to any sports or recreational facilities. They were not recognized as students or staff and were the only organized group that was denied campus privileges. It took an unbelievable amount of red tape to get the NYC and University officials together and convince both sides that the young people should be issued some form of temporary identification to be able to at least play pool and table tennis on their lunch hours and check out library books. The fact that the building supervisor fought the battle in their behalf was appreciated by the youth and contributed toward a closer relationship. One wonders why government programs cannot be a little more people-oriented in the first place.

CONCLUSION

Is this Program beneficial to the enrollees and/or the cooperating institution and what is the price of success?

There is no doubt that certain diseconomies result due to the amount of supervisory time required in utilizing this source of manpower. During the course of the Program, ten library employees became involved to varying degrees in 1:1 supervision of the seven NYC positions. The agreement with the Program had specified that one hour of supervision would be provided for every ten hours worked. In actuality, the amount of supervision required was not ten percent but closer to thirty percent or more. Thus, while the library received approximately 1,200 hours of "free" youth-power, at least 360 hours of professional and clerical time was expended in training and supervision which is certainly an expensive proposition.

But the NYC Program cannot be assessed according to profit/loss formulas, no verifyable break-even point exists to measure financial

benefits when organizations participate in social issues. More stands to be gained from the NYC experience than the tangible fruits of the young people's efforts. Success can be measured less in what went on than in what followed when the youth went home.

As a result of his positive experiences in the library, one of the enrollees registered at the University and wants to continue working in the library with the supervisors who had encouraged and motivated him. Can one weigh this against the value of a committee report that perhaps was postponed due to lack of a supervisor's time? What is the price of human development? Can there be a trade-off between a number of reference searches and the bright smile and shining eyes of the NYC enrollee who reports triumphantly that as a result of information and counseling on financial aids derived from library sources she has been granted a scholarship to a prestigious university? One girl obtained full-time employment based on the training and recommendations received at Kresge Library. Her future potential and improved outlook provides a good indication of the Program's success.

If the full potential of the NYC undertaking is to be realized, however, a greater cooperation between the NYC Program and the sponsoring agency is necessary. The NYC Program directors cannot let their responsibilities end with indiscriminate hiring, dropping the unscreened and untested young people on the employer's doorstep, and firing them when problems arise.

The Program clearly shows that besides initiative, enthusiasm, and talent, young people need access to the Program for counseling and support. Getting this support is part of the learning process for young people, and should be a principal objective in itself. They need the kind of support that teaches them responsibility rather than the inefficiency and confusion of bureaucracy.

In retrospect, and after reading the reports of the various supervisors, I would definitely be willing to work with the NYC again. The Program, although costly in some aspects, was mutually beneficial inasmuch as several special projects were completed, the youth learned job skills, and earned those very vital paychecks. Next time, however, I would place the youth only with supervisors who can provide instruction and encouragement that leaves room for youth initiative and enthusiasm, even mistakes.

Projects such as the NYC may not be a direct responsibility of the library or even the University but it is a challenge we must face as public institutions. In the case of youth, I agree with the philosophy of the late Robert F. Kennedy:[2]

> "Daily before our eyes there is a growing army of unemployed and out-of-school youth. The challenge is to create new and meaningful opportunities for those young people. If we ignore this challenge, we invite the discontented and deprived to search for other solutions. I have seen some of the solutions: There are the young hoodlums who think of nothing but getting into the rackets. There are those who turn, instead, to theft, burglary and shoplifting as a career. There are those unfortunates who become addicted to narcotics before they are out of their teens. I have seen these young on the streets and in prisons. I don't like what I have seen."

These thoughts are as valid today as they were in August, 1963. If the opportunity arises, libraries would do well to participate in projects such as the NYC--the financial rewards may not be great or even nonexistent but the human potential is waiting to be released to its full capacity.

REFERENCES

1. Harvey L. Ross, Productive Employment of the Disadvantaged: Guidelines for Action, an Operating Manual. (Los Angeles, California, Human Interaction Research Institute, 1973). ED 080693

2. The Quotable Robert F. Kennedy. (New York, Grosset and Dunlap, 1967), p.192.

Background information in preparation for this project was also obtained from:

U. S. Department of Labor, Comptroller General of the U.S., Difficulties of the Neighborhood Youth Corps In-School Program and Its Management Problems. Washington, D. C., February 20, 1973. ED 080692